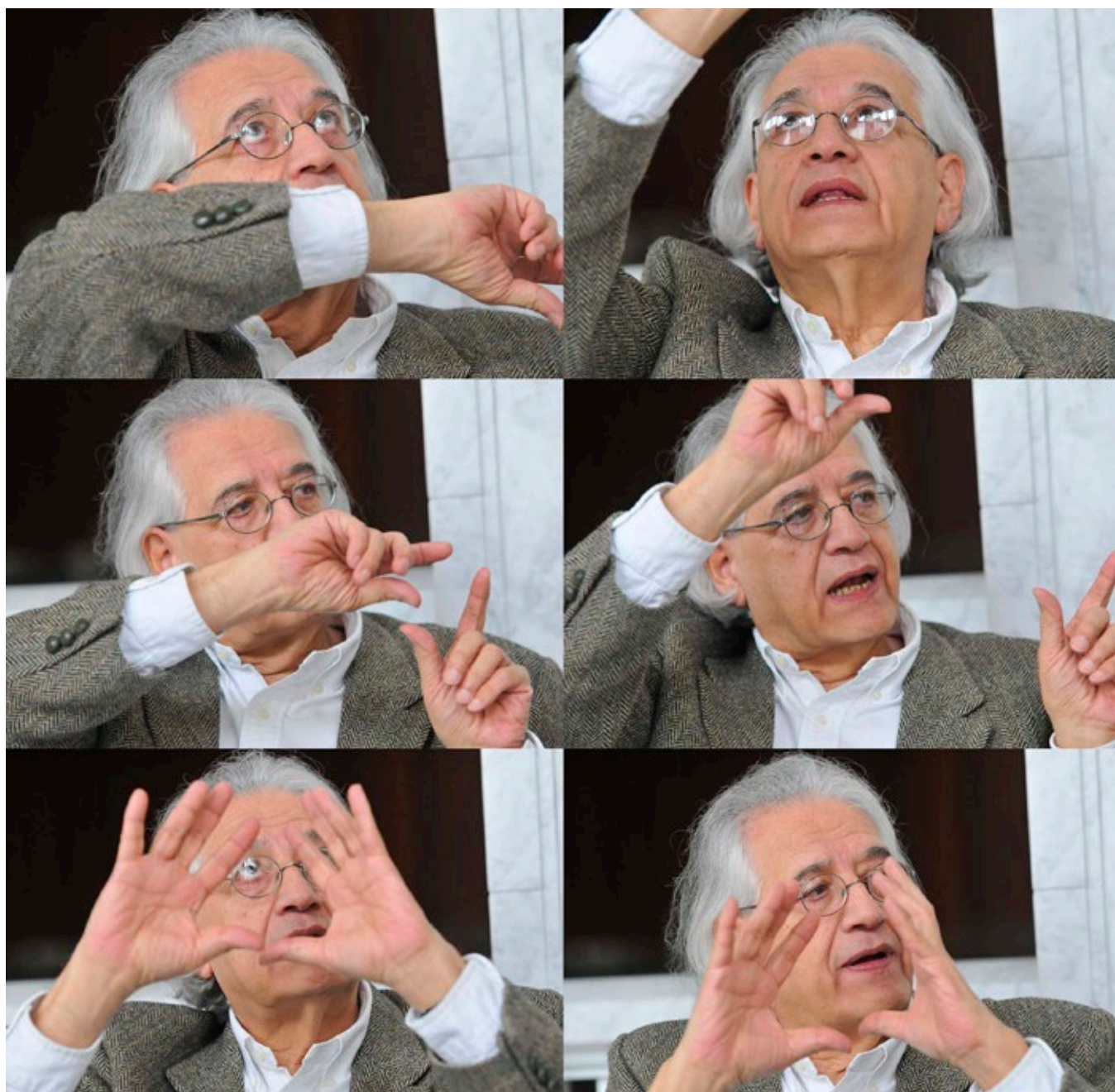


INTERVIEW

# Interview with Patricio Guzman



1. Patricio Guzmán, 2013 Giza Eskubideen Zinemaldia - Festival de Cine y DDHH. Picture by Argazkia /Iñigo Royo CC BY-SA 2.0 DEED Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic

**1.** The year 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of Chile's coup d'état, the death of Salvador Allende and the beginnings of the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. Your three-part documentary film *The Battle of Chile* (1975-1979) is a documentary monument to the historical memory of these events that transcended borders. How do you regard your documentary films after all these years? How have you dealt with these events and how does today's Chilean society deal with them?

**PG:** I am happy that I can make a documentary film about the reality facing Chile every three years. That gives direction to my life as a filmmaker.

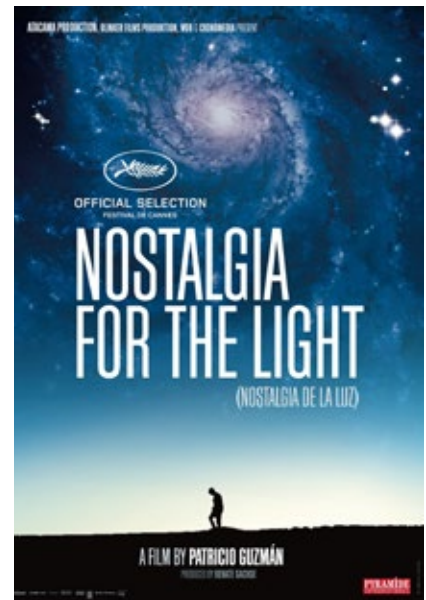
Chilean society tackles the issue with the same spirit it has always shown, divided into roughly two factions.

**2.** The memory of the political and social struggles and repression experienced in Chile is the cornerstone of your films. To explore the subject, you have made use of artistic language, metaphor and geography, which are very much a feature of films such as *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), *The Pearl Button* (2015) and *The Cordillera of Dreams* (2019). Is artistic language the best tool for conveying the memory of a traumatic past?

**PG:** That's... This is what comes to mind every time I start a film. It's personal. Every artist has their own language that makes them tick.

**3.** In this issue of *Observing Memories* we wanted to examine documentary film and photography as vehicles for the transmission of memory. What makes documentary film different from other vehicles? What makes it special? Moreover, what are the limitations documentary film might encounter when it comes to conveying memory?

**PG:** Here you are talking to me about different things. I never envisage transmission channels.



2 | 3 | 4. Posters of the movies "Nostalgia for the Light" (2010), "The Pearl Button" (2015), and "The Cordillera of Dreams" (2019). This trilogy by Patricio Guzmán addresses the lasting impacts of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship.

I make cinematographic films because it is my profession and I learned to do so in my youth when I was studying; then comes experience, time, years and style and one's personal life.

The other issue is the difference between a documentary and other films. For a good film that difference is not that significant, first it has to be good so that it gives something to the viewer that touches and interests them. Then there are many differences, in the crew size, in the writing style, in the openness of the script and/or the set. There is also the fact that there are no actors, they are real-life characters who want to be involved, and then the budget is much smaller.

**4. The world of television platforms has borne a major impact on film development, both in terms of production and distribution. What influence can these platforms have on the evolution of art-house documentary filmmaking?**

**PG:** Well, it is a very topical and far-reaching issue. First you realise that it poses a threat to the cinema that we all used to frequent to watch a film on a proper big screen and enjoy it. The protracted Covid period has shown that people watched everything at home or on their computers because the cinema was no longer in operation. New film-watching habits came to the fore. Today, here in France at least, people are tending to revert to the cinema, precisely because it is not the same and that culture cannot be replaced by a “click”. Production and distribution, which have always been difficult for documentaries, remain a real concern, and new financing, production and distribution methods have emerged.

**5. Who were your main influences in documentary filmmaking? Which current documentary films and filmmakers catch your eye the most and why?**

**PG:** Your question is the makings of a book. The first films that moved me when I was 17 years old and that I saw in Chile were films like *Mondo Cane* by Gualtiero Jacopetti, *The Living Desert* by Walt Disney,

*The Silent World* by Jacques Yves Cousteau and Louis Malle, *Night and Fog* by Alain Resnais, *Las Callampas* by Rafael Sánchez, *European Nights* by Alessandro Blasetti, *My Struggle* by Erwin Leiser, and *To Die in Madrid* by Frédéric Rossif.

Today in each country, there is a group of some 20 top documentary filmmakers whose cinematic language is outstanding. But if I were to name just a few, it would be unfair to all the others.

**6. In *My Imaginary Country* (2022) you address the state of affairs in Chile from the revolts and social unrest of 2019 to Gabriel Boric's victory in the 2021 elections. What role has the memory of 1973 played in the demands made by the social movements that led the uprisings?**

**PG:** In my opinion, there is almost no connection between them, apart from the fact that cultural aspects such as slogans, songs and music as cultural heritage are repeated. As far as I can see, the demands have been echoed for decades, even beyond Chile, for a more decent and fairer life. What was unexpected was the “explosion” effect.

**7. After the draft of the new Chilean constitution was rejected in the 2022 referendum, what are the future prospects you see for your country?**

**PG:** It's hard to answer from where I am and even in the country it's hard to answer. We will have to wait and see. I am much more of a filmmaker than a politician; I've filmed these events with enthusiasm and hope, like many Chileans of my own generation and others.

**8. What influence has Pinochetism exerted on Chile's current right-wing? How useful can the politics of democratic memory be in curbing the ultra-right?**

**PG:** Well, I am not an expert in socio-political matters. Nowadays it seems that the Chilean right wing is acting as if it had won for another thirty years. I think that is far from guaranteed.



5. Meeting of Salvador Allende in Concepción, 1971. Archivos Historia

**9. The Chilean dictatorship's sites of memory have a certain history and some, such as Villa Grimaldi, portray the image of a country concerned about their preservation and dissemination. Where does Chile stand right now with regard to its sites of memory? What challenges must they face in the current political climate? How can this type of heritage be used for the development of audiovisual products?**

**PG:** Many films have been made on the subject of memory in Chile and I believe that they will keep on being made.

**10. You have lived in Europe since you had to leave Chile in the 1970s and you now reside in France. What do you think of the memory policies that have been developed in Chile and how do you regard those pursued in France and in Europe? What are their strong and weak points, and what are the main challenges they are up against?**

**PG:** Many new films are made every year in Europe about the Second World War. France is an exemplary producer of documentary films, far outstripping the production of other countries and thus contributing to the world's cinematic memory.



6. Gabriel Boric, president of Chile (2022). Picture: Paulo Slachevsky